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ABSTRACT

The author, in presenting observations and impressions gathered from his experience at Central Michigan University, concludes that a tripartite balance between faculty senate, teachers' union, and university administration appears to be the best way to protect sound program administration if unionization is present on a campus. Benefits and disadvantages of unionization are discussed, with the premise being that for any program or instruction to flourish, the faculty must feel they are being treated fairly and that they have had input into employment and working conditions. (MJB)

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EFFECTS OF UNIONIZATION ON PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

William Theunissen*

Speaker's Background: before making any remarks on this controversial subject, let me further introduce myself; more specifically, perhaps why I was asked to speak on the subject of unionization. Central Michigan University was the first four-year institution in the country to have collective bargaining. I have been the dean of one of its academic schools, the School of Health, Physical Education & Recreation, during the eight years it has been on our campus. I was on the administrative bargaining team for the first contract. Since that time I have administered in its presence.

I do not claim to be an expert, or even a student of, bargaining - in fact, I would classify myself as one being quite ingorant of the technicalities involved. I speak strictly from a subjective basis, relating to observations that I have made and impressions that I have received. These would be limited to the Central Michigan University scene.

Perhaps at this point I should emphasize one characteristic of the bargained contracts resulting at Central Michigan University - different than on many other campuses - we have been able to pretty well restrict the bargaining to matters of "economic issues (salary and fringes) and conditions of employment."

A second important characteristic of Central Michigan University is the fact that an academic senate exists. This senate is a very active one and handles most of the traditional educational consideratio

There are two directions that this talk could take. One would be an attempt to be very specific on how program administration might be affected by unionization, while the other would be to take a more general approach and hope that you could apply some of it to your own situation. I have chosen the latter, feeling that each situation is unique but that there might be some general principles that would help almost anywhere. If there is time for questions you may wish to get more specific than the direction that I have chosen to take.

Basic Premise: for any programs and instruction to flourish best, whether or not unionization exists, there must be an environment where the faculty feel that they are being treated fairly and when they feel that they have had input into decisions affecting their employment and working conditions.

A concern of all administrators should be faculty mood. Ignorance of this has led to the introduction of most of the unionization as it now exists. Central Michigan University was no exception. I will

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speak later on ways to help achieve this very necessary objective.

Speaking of the faculty, the majority of them are often "riding the fence." They are anti-union by nature and feel that it is unprofessional (except those who may have lived with it in secondary schools). This puts them in a real dilemma when conditions exist on the campus which are leading to, or have led to, unionization. Faculty mood can be seen as being important prior to any unionization or when they are under a bargaining agreement.

Basic Problem: most of the bargaining to this point in time has been under the industrial model. Industry can live with, and accept, a concept born out of dissimilar ends, that is, the concept that each of the opposing groups wants to maximize its own interests. The university can not accept this since both faculty and administration have the same goals.

The administration wants to "give", but it must give within the total needs of the university. The faculty "pulls" at the bargaining table to maximize its own well-being. If the faculty does not give evidence of concern with the "total picture" then the administration has to assume the role of adversary.

Administrations must find new ways of doing bargaining to preserve the nature of the university process of decision-making.

"Solution": still speaking in generalities, what suggestions would I give to make the bargaining process more positive? First, I would hope the contract could restrict itself to Salaries, Fringes and Conditions of Employment. This is a very difficult position for any administration to maintain but because of the many examples that can be cited where other institutions have not "held the line." I believe that a Senate and a Bargaining Unit can both co-exist on a campus; they are at Central Michigan University. Second, the administration must be very careful that it does not "paint too rosy a picture" of the economic situation. It is amazin how some seemingly innocent statement can come back to roost at the bargaining table. You soon learn to think-twice before issuing any statements. Third, is a point that I feel has been lost in most faculty negotions, probably because most people assume that it is a posture that is not possible during bargaining. Earlier I mentioned the importance of a proper faculty mood on campus. One quick way to lose this is to "play games at the table." At Central Michigan University we have just negotiated a new three year contract, deliberations having started back last April, and the relationship between the Faculty Association and the Administration is at an all-time low. We have four or five other unions on campus and I have noted that the relationship between these union leaders and our university personnel chief, who does the negotiating, remains very friendly and cordial. Being quite upset over the atmosphere with the faculty, I asked the head of our personnel office how he had achieved and maintained his positive relationship. I would like to share with you his answer. He felt that two words would describe the necessary ingrediants - honesty and professionalism.

It must be recognized that there will be disagreement because the two sides come from different angles. There are honest ways of compromise that do not become a sell-out. It is not a matter of trickery or matching-wits. After a heated discussion do not get trapped into the mood of "they deserve what they get." Personality conflicts can not be allowed to influence decisions! Hopefully the two leaders respect each other, even if not apparent on the surface, and the two sides recognize the other as being human and likeable. I recognize that this sounds "naive" to many negotiators. Make things congruous - blow the hell out of myths such as "administrators are all stuffy", "can not relax", "can not mix with common folks", etc., etc.. Too often the administrative team will win a point at the table because of a known misunderstanding or simply plain ignorance by the opposition. Friends, this will come back to haunt you at the next contract talks. That is what the person meant by honesty; otherwise you pay the price later and have built up an atmosphere of suspicion. The same results can occur if one of the teams, or members of a team, have an air of arrogance during the bargaining sessions. We ran into this at Central Michigan University. Be "up front" about it even if it delays the contract. Try to get a relationship that 1) maintains personal respect even through disagreement exists at the table and 2) feel that you are not glossing over the topic and are speaking straight out. We need less polarization, more collegiality, and a less adversarial approach. This, as opposed to an arm length relationship based upon power. This entire concept has been lost, or never started, in most bargaining and indirectly it results in poorer instruction and programs.

Personnel: I have alluded to some of the characteristics necessary for successful bargaining. I might add that certain expertise is admisable on the administrative team, for the benefit of both sides. I would prefer to see the head negotiator having a sound academic background, probably having specialized in collective bargaining; also, a legal aid who understands academia; also, access to the administrator who has the "feel" for the state fiscal condition and its future - so the team will not commit too much of the future; and, also, someone with success dealing with people and might have particularly good rapport (not trickery). It is a mistake if the negotiating team does not talk over proposals with the deans, academic vice presidents, etc.. Do not innocently give away the governance of the university.

Advantages and Disadvantages: I would like to summarize some of the advantages and disadvantages of unionization on the campus, as observed in my eight years of working with it. Hopefully out of this ill emerge my answers to the questions posed in the title of this presentation, "Effects of Unionization on Program Administration."

I would summarize the primary advantages as follows:

1. Many hours of concentrated deliberation occur. The total hours on some subjects would exceed the total deliberations of the senate for an entire academic year.
2. Departmental and university procedures become much more systemized. An individual knows what he or she can expect in regard to tenure, promotion, voting rights, etc., etc..
3. The systematic preparation it requires leads all of its participants to a deeper knowledge of the university.

4. The process is more rigid, procedurally. There is less chance for bias.
5. If one believe in shared governance (participation by all parties) then it can result here.

I would summarize the disadvantages or problems as follows:

1. Although there is great deliberation, the input to the bargaining team gets limited, particularly on academic issues. This can be a severe mistake.
2. The cost of the bargaining process, together with the increased salaries for faculty, can result in insufficient equipment dollars, student assistance monies, travel allotments, etc..
3. Unfavorable publicity can hurt the university image and raise hard feelings in the local community.
4. Rifts created at the table can expand into hostile rivalries and spread across the campus.
5. The tremendous demand on time - hours and hours - could be spent for program enhancement.
6. There is little chance to award merit pay. The effect of this on the good instructors and their programs becomes obvious.

There is no cut-and-dried answer. Some programs have been improved and others have definitely been hindered. Procedurally I have seen improvement while resource support for programs has decreased. If we go back to our basic assumption that a healthy faculty mood is necessary, then on some campuses "driven to bargaining," this one factor alone may ensure program improvement.

Collective bargaining is "here to stay." I prefer a university without it but feel that a sound educational program can be carried on under it. How "sound" will depend on many of the items to which I have alluded. It is paramount that the educational leaders in the administrative positions have input into agreements made. Along with economics and a grievance procedure, a top aim of most faculty bargaining teams is to eliminate administrative vetoes over personnel recommendations. Feeling that this is a chief function of the administration, it is imperative that formalized departmental procedures must gain approval by higher administration before they go into effect. Actually this strengthens the hand of the department and places responsibility on the dean or director. If the university has a faculty or academic senate, the administration will need to protect it during bargaining as unions will attempt to eliminate or take over all of its powers. A tripartite balance between Senate, Union and Administration seems to me to be the best way to protect sound program administration if unionization is to be present on a campus. Within the constraints of resources available, I feel programs have continues to fluorish at Central Michigan University.

I believe that I will stop at this point. Perhaps some of my subjective observations may have raised questions. Or, some of you may wish to share your own experiences. I will turn this back to Dr. Montgomery at this point.

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Some possible questions that might arise :

1. Role of the department chairmen? Their influence upon programs?

2. Role of the students in the bargaining and governance of the university?

3. Role of the governing board in bargaining decisions?

4. Impact of the results of bargaining upon the legislature? The resultant impact upon programs?

5. Do changes in Tenure and Promotion result from unionization?

6. Where the future predicts retrenchment of faculty positions, what influence will this have upon bargaining? What implications does it have for programs?